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**The Passion of Tiger Woods: An Anthropologist Reports on Golf, Race, and Celebrity Scandal, by Orin Starn, Durham, Duke University Press, 2011, 160pp., ISBN 978-08223-5210-5**

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When the revolution comes do not be surprised if the last remnants of the old order are found hunkered down in plush golf course clubhouses, waving their Scotty Camerons at the advancing rabble. Obsessed with tradition, golf is a sport that has significant problems with progress. As recently as 2003, a number of PGA professionals felt it appropriate to voice loud public disapproval when the great Swedish golfer Annika Sörenstam became the first female player in 58 years to be allowed entry to a men's tour event. And, though the Royal & Ancient (golf's governing body outside the US and Mexico) finally voted in September 2014 to admit women as members at St. Andrews, the memberships of other elite European Tour courses – including Muirfield, Troon, and Royal St. George's – remain resolutely single sex. The story is little better in the US: Augusta National, home of The Masters, only admitted its first female members in 2012, with Condoleezza Rice being one of the two, exclusive, token accessories.

Golf's relationship with race is no less troubled. During a pre-tournament speech in May 2013, for example, the high-profile Spanish player Sergio Garcia made a remark about serving fried chicken to Tiger Woods. Its offensive nature was, and remains, obvious to most observers. But it was also eerily familiar, the American golfer Fuzzy Zoeller having made exactly the same quip about Woods in 1997. Both times, a media storm ensued. But the latter incident was remarkable for the calls for calm from George O'Grady, Chief Executive of the European Tour. Feet firmly in his mouth, O'Grady said that his organization welcomed all races before pointing out that Garcia could not possibly be racist because many of his best friends 'happen to be coloured athletes'. While it was scarcely credible that one of sport's top administrators could be quite so clumsy with his use of language, Europe's Ryder Cup captain, Colin Montgomerie, underlined the level of race anxiety among golf's highest echelons, by commenting: 'Christ, we're all frightened to say anything. We're scared to open our mouths in case we say something that isn't kosher in 2013 [...] George says coloured, somebody else says black, but who is to say who is right and wrong?' (Mcguire 2013).

'Monty' would do well to read Orin Starn's *The Passion of Tiger Woods* – as would anyone else wishing to cultivate a more nuanced vocabulary with which to tackle the sensitive issues of identity politics, or those seeking to understand the culture from which such anxiety

arises. As Starn comments early in this volume, 'golf has always traced the fault lines of conflict, hierarchy, and tension in America, among them the archetypal divides of race and class' (p. xv). Along the way, readers will digest a brief history of golf that accentuates the sport's structural racism and includes an important outline of the usually hidden history of minority participation. This provides the foundations for an extended analysis of Tiger Woods' extraordinary effect on golf culture, and his wider impact as a celebrity.

Groomed from birth for stardom by his parents, Earl and Kultida, the book opens with an image showing a two-year-old Tiger about to perform his golf skills on the set of America's top talk show in 1978. 'That Tiger was a little brown kid in what most Americans still thought of as a lily-white sport only added to the novelty', writes Starn (p. x). At age 20, as an amateur prodigy already being hailed as the next great thing in the pro ranks, Woods left Stanford with a \$40 million Nike contract. A year later, in 1997, he won The Masters by 11 strokes. The legendary Jack Nicklaus commented, 'He plays a game with which I am not familiar', alluding to Woods' single-minded focus on preparation and training that allowed him to be both physically and mentally superior to the opposition. In this, Woods altered the culture of professional golf, raising the collective standard of elite players like no player before him. Along the way, Woods attracted new audiences and raised golf's profile, while rising to a stardom that transcended the sport. Starn notes that Woods became golf's 'golden goose', increasing both sponsorship income and prize money across the board, while profiting handsomely himself: 'By his early thirties, he was a one-man multi-national company...the first athlete to earn \$1 billion. He and his blonde-haired, blue-eyed wife, Elin Nordegren, seemed the poster couple for a shiny new postracial America' (pp. x-xi).

Tiger's rise was based on his outrageous talent, together with the careful construction of his public image that emphasized traits of self-control and a single-mindedness to succeed, alongside a private, family-man persona centred on loyalty and moral rectitude. Woods, then, was the perfect poster boy for Nike and for golf: an alluring mix of tradition and innovation; a harmonious figure who had the commercial nous to largely refrain from making political statements, despite being immersed in a sport that remained overwhelmingly the domain of rich Caucasians. In this way, Woods is more a Michael Jordan than a (pre-1990s) Muhammad Ali. Starn relates how Nike initially attempted to position Woods as a 'racial pioneer' by having him say in an advert: 'There are still some golf courses in the United States that I cannot play because of the color of my skin'. However, as Starn notes, 'Tiger would go on to make hundreds

of other commercials without ever again pushing the hot button of race' (p. 71). When Woods did talk about his heritage, he claimed the term 'Cablinasian': a neologism coined from mixing parts of the terms Caucasian, Black, American Indian, and Asian, and a nod to both his parents' multiracial backgrounds. As Starn suggests, while his star was in the ascendancy, this was rarely cited as a problem. However, when his career hit trouble, the term became one of the sticks used to beat him. As Paul Gilroy has suggested elsewhere, those who do not fit into accepted, fixed racial categories unleash 'radical uncertainties' about who they are and for what they stand (Gilroy 2004: 148).

Starn's book, which he describes as 'an anatomy of Tigergate' (p. xii), focuses mainly on charting and analyzing the fallout of the events of November 27, 2009, a scandal that dramatically altered the dynamics of Woods' career and celebrity. Media reports of a car crash outside his Florida mansion unleashed a torrent of innuendo about Woods' private life, much of which subsequently turned out to be true. And so the aura that surrounded Tiger – a man who had named his yacht 'Privacy' – quickly began to dissolve. Although the title of Starn's book gestures towards a psychoanalytical reading of Woods himself, its contents are much more focused on what the scandal can teach us about the nature of contemporary America. 'Tigergate', writes Starn, 'showed an America angry, afraid, transfixed, curious, and resentful about racial politics in both old and new ways' (p. xvii). By assessing discourse from social media, chatrooms, and message boards, alongside articles and reports from traditional media sources, Starn paints a picture of an America, in the digital age, still fundamentally ill at ease with matters of race. While the mainstream media almost pathologically avoided mentioning race in relation to the scandal, Starn's analysis of social media reveals 'all manner of prejudice, bigotry, and sometimes sheer weirdness' that the anonymity of the Internet allowed to be expressed (p. 58). The scandal revealed, therefore, a 'disjunction between public and private in race talk [that] is typical of America today' (p. 85). Highlighting this is one of the book's main achievements, alongside exposing the hollowness of 'post-racial' talk and the folly of investing in individualist politics: despite Woods dominating professional golf for over a decade, there are currently fewer PGA Tour players from ethnic minority backgrounds than there were in the 1970s.

Written in consistently elegant prose, Starn's short book is an admirable example of a crossover text in which complex ideas are distilled and put to good use for broad consumption. A Professor of Cultural Anthropology at Duke, Starn is as at home with pop culture as he is

with high theory, and his range of examples is impressive and expansive; his analysis interesting and clear-headed. This is a text in which the Tiger phenomenon is explained through a discussion that weaves together such incongruous figures as Jack Nicklaus, Fidel Castro, Martha Stewart, and Richard Dyer – which makes for a pleasant, entertaining read. Scholars of celebrity will find little new in terms of theoretical revelation: indeed, there are very few direct references to even the Big Beasts of academic star and celebrity studies, Professor Dyer notwithstanding. However, *The Passion of Tiger Woods* is a highly accomplished example of how to historicize, deconstruct, and analyze a public figure, and illustrate how multiple meanings and anxieties are inevitably bound up in a truly global phenomenon like Woods. As such, it would be of great use to both undergraduate students and the general reader, even those who might stare blankly at the mention of celebrity studies as an academic discipline. Including, one suspects, Messrs O’Grady and Montgomerie.

## References

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